



Pope Francis Speaks of Mary to Fr. Alexandre Awi Mello

Fr. Alexandre Awi Mello is a member of the Secular Institute Schoenstatt Fathers in Brazil, presently serving as director of Schoenstatt Youth Activities. He is fluent in Portuguese, Spanish, German and English. There were two significant events for which he was called upon to assist Pope Francis as a *segundo secretario*. The first was the 2007 Latin American bishops' conference (CELAM) at the Marian shrine of Aparecida in Brazil, and the second was the 2013 World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro.

Fr. Alexandre studied at the Vallendar Theological Institute, Germany, and he is a doctoral candidate at the International Marian Research Institute. While planning a book on the Virgin Mary and popular Marian devotion, Fr. Alexandre recalled the conversations he had had with the then-Cardinal Bergoglio at Aparecida in 2007 and with the now-Pope Francis at World Youth Day 2013.

In 2012, while on a short sabbatical in Europe, Fr. Alexandre wrote a note to Pope Francis telling him of the book he intended to write, and asking if the pope would consent to speak with him about the Virgin Mary and Marian devotion. Very soon, he received the response from Pope Francis:

"I am happy that you are in Europe and that we could come together for a meeting. How about December 26, 10:30 a.m., in Casa Santa Marta. Yes, I am all right with having the interview be part of the book you are writing on Mary. If the date which I propose is not good for you, let me know and we'll find another time."



Fr. Alexandre accompanying the pope.

The pope's response left Alexandre speechless. He writes, "I couldn't believe it. Although I knew him a little before, his response and his simplicity amazed me. There was Bergoglio, arranging his own agenda as always, suggesting alternatives and accepting my request to speak with him directly about Virgin Mary. Could he possibly have thought that I would have something more important to do on December 26 that he would add 'if you can't make it?'"

On the appointed day, Pope Francis graciously received him, saying, "We have reserved one hour and twenty minutes for the meeting. Will that be enough?" Fr. Alexandre came prepared with many questions: the first dealt with the pope's childhood and his earliest remembrances. The pope spoke freely of the Marian influences in his early family life and schooling. He recalled especially the influence of his grandmother who took care of him, teaching him the Marian prayers. He referred to the Marian influences at the Salesian College in Buenos Aires that he attended, and to Don Bosco's Salesians' dedication to Mary Help of Christians (*Auxilium Christianorum*).

Alexandre Awi Mello. *Ella es mi Mamá: Encuentros del Papa Francisco con María*. Argentina: Patris, 2014.



The Saint John's Bible presented to Pope Francis, April 17, 2015.

What do the Fibonacci sequence, mitochondrial DNA, fractals, chaos theory, digital voiceprints, harmonics and Hubble images of deep space all have in common?

Faith, Reason and *The Saint John's Bible*

October 15, 2015 (See page 5)

And it was while he was at the Salesian College that Bergoglio decided to become a Jesuit.

Francis recalled that at the end of his episcopal ordination as auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires in 1992, he had distributed, as was the custom, a small image of Mary as the “Untier of Knots” (*María Desatanudos*). He became familiar with the image, originating in Bavaria, while studying in Germany. In the 17th century, a Bavarian painter was commissioned by Ambrosius Langenmantel to portray an image of Mary (Our Lady of Good Counsel) as “Untier of Knots.” At the time, the “knots” referred to the difficulties which Langenmantel was experiencing in his marriage and family. The reference for “Untier of Knots” came from the second-century St. Irenaeus of Lyons, who, when comparing Eve and Mary, said “the knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by the obedience of Mary: what Eve bound by her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened by her faith.” Bergoglio promoted the devotion in Buenos Aires. He related the picture to its origins and spoke of the image as “Patroness of Marriages and Daily Problems.”

“If the date which is I proposed is not good for you, let me know and we’ll find another time.”

– Pope Francis to Fr. Alexandre

Next in the conversation, Fr. Alexandre posed a question (frequently discussed by Mariologists) on the “theological foundations” or starting point for Francis’ Marian devotion. Rather than a theological discourse, the pope replied that the foundation of his Marian devotion were two Marian prayers which he recited daily (along with the rosary). The first prayer — *Sub tuum praesidium* — was found in the office of both the Eastern and Western Church dating from the early centuries. It is a prayer directed to Mary, Mother of God, requesting her intercession and assistance, with confidence that as mother she is attentive to the needs of her children. The Spanish text — *Bajo tu amparo nos acogemos* — recalled to Francis his association with the Ukrainian community in Buenos Aires and their devotion of placing themselves under the mantle (*Prokov*) of the Virgin Mary.

The second prayer which Pope Francis gave as the basis of his Marian devotion was the 11th century



Pope Francis and Our Lady of Aparecida

antiphon — *Alma redemptoris Mater*. Mary is “the loving Mother of the Redeemer ... the gate of heaven, the star of the sea, who, to the astonishment of nature, gave birth to the Redeemer. God’s mother came to save especially those who are falling.” To represent and bring God’s love and tenderness to the world is Mary’s fundamental mission.

As auxiliary and later archbishop of Buenos Aires, he began to see the great value of Marian shrines as a means of evangelization. Not far from Buenos Aires is the Marian shrine of Luján. Our Lady of Luján is patroness of Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.

The Archdiocese of Buenos Aires regularly sponsored weekend pilgrimages to Luján. As auxiliary bishop and then archbishop of Buenos Aires, Bergoglio participated in these pilgrimages. At Luján, Francis witnessed the deep influence that Marian sanctuaries can have on pilgrims. Prayer before the central image of the shrine can be a turning point leading to a deeper conversion and dedication. He remarked, “At Luján, I discovered the Virgin.”

The second Marian shrine which deeply influenced Francis was Aparecida. Its origins are with Brazilian fishermen who in 1719 found a small wooded image of Our Lady, which they named *Nossa Senhora Aparecida*, the “Madonna Who Appeared.” The statue was enshrined in a church near Guaratinguetá, close to São Paulo; in the 20th century an enormous basilica church was built there. *Nossa Senhora Aparecida* was named patroness of Brazil, the largest Catholic country in the world. The basilica shrine of Aparecida is the second largest Church in the Christian world, and one which is visited by 10 million people annually — several hundred thousand on Marian feast days.

When Francis returned to Brazil in 2013 (World

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Youth Day), he spoke of his experience at Aparecida: “Six years ago the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean was held in this Shrine. Something beautiful took place here, which I witnessed at first hand. I saw how the Bishops — who were discussing the theme of encountering Christ, discipleship and mission — felt encouraged, supported and in some way inspired by the thousands of pilgrims who came here day after day to entrust their lives to Our Lady. That Conference was a great moment of Church. It can truly be said that the Aparecida document was born of this interplay between the work of the Bishops and the simple faith of the pilgrims, under Mary’s maternal protection.”

The interview, eventually lasting two and a half hours, took up other topics: the value of new dogmatic formulations, current Marian apparitions, the role of women in the Church. Francis held that Mary was deeply part of the one mystery of Christ and the Church, that she was *socia Christi* — the one who cooperates with and is associated with Christ. The Marian dimension of the Church precedes the Petrine dimension. Mary and the feminine represent something more important for the Church than the papacy, the hierarchy, the priesthood. The feminine

represents the soul of the Church. That which Mary represents — love and tenderness — are of the essence and nature of the Church (GE 287).

In explaining the relation of Mary to the Church, Francis recalled the distinction made by the 11th century Cistercian Isaac of Stella (+1169): “Both Mary and Church are the mother of Christ, but neither of the two gives birth to Christ without the other.” Isaac also spoke of the mutual relation of the Church, Mary and the individual believer: What is said about the Church (*universaliter*) is applicable to the Virgin Mary in a special way (*specialiter*), but also to the individual believer (*personaliter*). The pope asked Alexandre for his final question; it was “Who is Mary for you?” Francis replied, “She is truly my mother ... I am a stern man, not accustomed to crying, but with her, I can cry.”

Fr. Alexandre immediately wrote down the results of the interview with the pope, and by Easter 2013 the Portuguese edition of his book was ready. He sent a copy of the book to the pope for his approval. Francis replied: “Thank you for yesterday’s letter and thanks also for remembering me with a copy of the book. You ask that I read and correct it. That’s fine, but I prefer to give you permission to publish the book without my reading the text. ... This past week something happened to me related to the Virgin Mary. I was praying the *Sub Tuum Praesidium* and I remembered the prayer of the Eastern monks: ‘In time of difficulty, we take refuge under your mantle, O Mother of God.’ And then suddenly it occurred to me that it was raining and I was getting wet. I was distracted and had withdrawn from Mary’s mantle, and I thought about the matters which cause us to distance ourselves from the Virgin. I wish you a happy and holy Easter. May Jesus and Mary bless and protect you. And, don’t forget to pray for me. Sincerely, Francisco.”



Our Lady of Aparecida
(Marian Library Collection)

“I saw how the Bishops . . . felt encouraged, supported and in some way inspired by the thousands of pilgrims who came here day after day to entrust their lives to Our Lady.”

– Pope Francis

The Virgin Mary and Consecrated Life:

Consecration, Communion, Mission

The term “consecrated life” may be new in the Catholic vocabulary. Formerly, we spoke about “the religious life” and “the religious vocation.” Now new types of the religious life have developed: secular institutes, societies of apostolic life, consecrated virgins, hermits. The Church has always “moderated” the religious institutes, but their relation to the Church was not clearly defined.

Vatican II’s significant statement on the religious life is found in its document on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*). Here, the chapter on the religious life appropriately follows the universal call to holiness and precedes the pilgrim nature of the Church. The consecrated life is described as a “special gift in the life of the Church, contributing to the saving mission of the Church” (LG 43). Religious consecration comes about by the profession of the evangelical counsels. The religious life belongs to the life and holiness of the Church. The Church sets it forth as consecration to God.

At the 1995 Synod of Bishops, Pope John Paul II asked the bishops to “illuminate the role of the consecrated life and its mission in the Church.” In the document from the synod (*Vita Consecrata*), the pope stated, “I hope that this reflection will continue and lead to a deeper understanding of the great gift of the consecrated life in its three aspects of consecration, communion, and mission and that the three must be considered integrally” (VC 13).

The model and pattern for the consecrated life is Christ, the first consecrated person, sent into the world with a mission. Consecration involves both God’s initiative and the person’s response. “Accepting his consecration by the Father, the Son in turn consecrates himself to the Father for the sake of humanity” (cf. Jn 17:19). The Church’s mission is exemplified in Christ and in the lives of those consecrated: “As Christ was consecrated and sent into the world (Jn. 10:36), making his whole life a salvific mission, in a similar manner, consecrated persons are called to reproduce in themselves the image of the first-born (Rom 8:29) and, through the action of the Spirit, must make their whole life a mission” (VC 72).

“The Church is essentially a mystery of communion, a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (VC 41). Consecrated persons are to be experts of communion and to practice the spirituality of communion as “witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design. . . .” The life of communion in fact “becomes a sign for all the world and a compelling force that leads people to faith in Christ. . . . In this way communion leads to mission, and itself becomes mission; indeed, consecration begets communion: in essence it is a communion that is missionary” (VC 46).

Mary is the model of consecration and discipleship. She reflects the divine beauty. She belongs completely to God and is totally devoted to him. She is the model of the acceptance of grace by humanity. “Consecrated life looks to her as the sublime model of consecration to the Father, union with the Son and openness to the Spirit, in the knowledge that acceptance of the ‘virginal and humble life’ of Christ also means imitation of Mary’s way of life” (VC 28).

In his 1987 letter to consecrated persons, Saint John Paul II spoke of consecrated life as a great gift to the Church, reminding consecrated persons of the relation “between the Mother of God and your vocation in the Church.” The Church’s presence is one of bringing about communion among all people. Mary is the image, model and icon of the Church, representing its maternal character. The pope’s letter concluded, “Since the Mother of God is constantly present in the life of the Church by reason of the part that she has in the mystery of Christ, your vocation and service are likewise a reflection of her presence.”



Every mission begins with
the attitude of Mary at
the Annunciation....

Image: *Madonna and Child after Sano di Pietro* by Sandra Bowden

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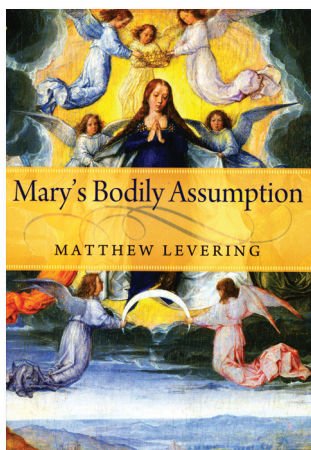
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Book Notes

Matthew Levering

MARY'S BODILY ASSUMPTION

Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015



The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary was defined as a dogma of faith 65 years ago, November 1, 1950. The Eastern Church writers wrote much on Mary's Dormition, but it was only in the 20th century that these writings became known in the West. It was Martin Jugie's editions of the Eastern writers in 1944 that proved

to be a deciding factor in the decision. Also petitions had come from many quarters requesting the definition; they were published in 1941 in impressive volumes, edited by G. Hentrich and R.G. de Moos, in a project supported by the Holy See.

In 1946, Pius XII put the question of defining the doctrine of the Assumption to the bishops of the world. Only 22 out of 1,181 dissented. In *Munificentis-*

simus Deus (1950), the pope interpreted the universal agreement of the "ordinary teaching authority as a certain and firm proof" that the Assumption is a truth that has been revealed by God. He went on to outline various testimonies, indications and signs of this common belief of the Church. The witness of the liturgy was recalled: the Gregorian Sacramentary contained the prayer *Veneranda* which spoke of the Mother of God who "suffered temporal death, but nevertheless could not be held back by the bonds of death."

Fr. René Laurentin had hoped that the 1950 proclamation of the Assumption would encourage further study of the doctrine. Rather than promote interest, the definition seemed to say that the goal had been achieved. And, in the post-Vatican II period, the papal definition of the Assumption, without Scriptural foundation, did not fare well in ecumenical discussions. In his 1982 book on the Assumption, Kilian Healy, O.Carm., regretted that he could not write a chapter on the Assumption and

ecumenism which “would be helpful to those who sincerely study it yet differ.”

Matthew Levering’s book is the first major work on the Assumption in over 30 years. He masterfully outlines how the contemporary understanding of Scripture and theology is applicable to the doctrine of the Assumption. The work is organized into two parts of three chapters each. The first three chapters are devoted to the teaching of the magisterium, the contribution of Neo-Scholasticism and the work of the *nouvelle théologie* (beginning with de Lubac and continuing with Bouyer, Balthasar and Ratzinger). The second half of the book, also in three neat chapters, deals with biblical interpretation (typological interpretation), the Church as the interpreter of the biblical revelation, and the principle of fittingness as applicable to the Assumption.

The second part of the book begins with “the validity and scope of typological exegesis,” a section which could be most valuable to those who concluded their theological education in the 1960s. There the Assumption is placed within the context of both a magisterial and ecumenical understanding of

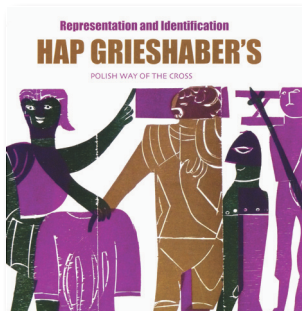
Scripture. Levering has worked on documents for Catholic-Evangelical dialogue, and throughout the work, reference is made to Evangelical theologians. The section on typological exegesis begins with Cardinal Newman’s insight into biblical events or figures as “types” or “figures” present throughout salvation history, and then draws on three contemporary Protestant approaches to typological exegesis from Richard Hays, Peter Enns and Peter Leithart. The last section on the fittingness of the Assumption enters into the grand themes of salvation history: Israel, the temple, the covenant, Mary the New Eve, Daughter of Zion.

In addition to dealing with the foundations of the Assumption as given in the papal definition, the work is a fine introduction to the evangelical theologians and their interpretation of Scripture. As Fr. Barron says in his recommendation, not only do we learn about the Assumption, but also of the development of doctrine, the typological reading of Scripture, and the theological significance of the principle of fittingness. It is a precise, beautifully carved presentation.

Johann Roten

REPRESENTATION AND IDENTIFICATION: HAP GRIESHABER’S POLISH WAY OF THE CROSS

Dayton, Ohio: ML/IMRI, 2014



Helmut Andreas Paul (HAP) Grieshaber (1909-1981) represents a school of art in Germany known as Expressionism which wishes to express in a purely personal manner some of the ways that good and evil exist in our world

and even compete with one another.

The representations in Grieshaber’s Polish Way of the Cross were created in 1967 and 1969 for the Church of the Atonement to be built in Auschwitz, but the plans were changed, and the church did not come about. This book contains the scenes created by Grieshaber, large format woodcuts, with Auschwitz in mind. They are the 14 traditional Stations of the Cross. Each station contains two or three large blocks, usually figures of the persons involved in the scene. The original text for these Stations of the Cross was written by Stephan Cardinal Wyszyński.

Representation and Identifications contains the Grieshaber images and a commentary for each station written by Fr. Johann Roten, S.M. The commentary is divided into three parts: the *Roots*, with Scriptural references from many sources; the *Representation*, that is, the description of the characters in the scene; and the *Identification*, the personal response of the participant. The work is part of the Marian Library’s *Art and Spirituality* series.

Catholic religious art usually portrays the order, harmony and beauty of creation. But there also exists within creation the mystery of evil — darkness, cruelty and the inhumanity into which human nature can descend. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of “the unbearable weight of human experience” deep within the recesses of the human person. Similarly, Roten’s commentary speaks of “truth finding complementary forms of human expression, above all when it is a matter of evoking what is beyond words: the depths of the human heart, the exaltations of the soul, the mystery of God.”



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Summer 2015

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